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Matters of Care in Alberta's "Inspiring Education" Policy: A Critical Feminist Discourse Analysis

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Using the ethics of care as a theoretical lens, alongside the techniques of discourse analysis, I critically analyze texts from Alberta's Inspiring Education policies. On the basis of this analysis, I identify two discourses: the sentimental treatment of care and the "facilitator discourse." I argue that a caring teacher-student relationship is more complex than a doting teacher responding to the desires of a "learner." We must begin to reflect in educational policies the reciprocity of caring educational relationships, the rightness of mutually accepted authority, and the skills required to competently perform the work of caring.

Adoptant la perspective théorique de l'éthique des soins et m'appuyant sur les techniques de l'analyse du discours, je fais une analyse critique de textes tirés des politiques albertaines sur l'inspiration et l'éducation. À partir de l'analyse, j'identifie deux discours : la perspective sentimentale des soins et le discours « facilitateur ». Je maintiens qu'un rapport chaleureux entre un enseignant et un élève est plus complexe que les actions d'un enseignant adorant qui répond aux désirs d'un « apprenant ». Nos politiques en matière d'éducation doivent commencer à refléter la réciprocité des rapports éducatifs chaleureux, la justesse d'une autorité mutuellement acceptée et les habiletés nécessaires pour bien accomplir le travail en soins dans un milieu scolaire.

In 2010, the government of Alberta released the steering committee report "Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans" (henceforth the "Inspiring Education Report"), a guiding document for an educational reform agenda that included a complete curriculum rewrite and a revision of the Teaching Quality Standard. In 2015, after over 40 years of Progressive Conservative government, the New Democratic Party was elected to power and, as it stands now, the vision of *Inspiring Education* has received very little public attention. As an elementary school teacher working in Alberta's capital city, my work is impacted in very real, very material ways by the "practice of power" (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009, p. 767) that is educational policymaking. How *Inspiring Education* will factor into our future is open to conjecture, making this moment ripe for its critical analysis.

In 2013, John E. Hull, the chair of the Association of Alberta Deans of Education (AADE), wrote about his involvement with *Inspiring Education*. He submitted a position paper to the expert panel struck by the AADE, on request of the Professional Standards Branch of Alberta Education. The panel's purpose was to answer the government's prescribed research question: What competencies do teachers need to support students to be engaged, ethical, and

entrepreneurial citizens?" (p. 17). Hull's position advocated for "the category of relationships as a necessary component of a TQS document" (p. 18).

Hull's work is a focused, local example of a critical perspective on the world views which are the foundation of *Inspiring Education*. I hope to add to this body of work; this time, approaching the "Inspiring Education Report" from a critical feminist perspective. Two research questions guide this project: Which discourses can be identified within *Inspiring Education* that represent a particular perspective on teachers' work? How do these discourses, as well as the specific discursive treatment of teachers, affect the possibilities of a caring teacher-student relationship? I begin with an exploration of the ethics of care, and then use care theory as a lens to analyze *Inspiring Education* policies. Through this analysis, I conclude that these discourses perpetuate a long standing pattern of establishing unrealistic expectations on teachers to care, while simultaneously denying the teacher as a competent adult who takes responsibility for leading students through the world as they know it. Female teachers have been especially disadvantaged by this pattern, judged against an ideal of maternal nurturance that denies the unique challenges of teaching in schools.

Defining Care

Care is a slippery concept to define because its meaning varies so widely in common use. Throughout this project, I distinguish between care as an ethical concept, caregiving or carework as the activities done in the service of care, and caring relationships as the result of personal interactions guided by an ethic of care.

Tronto (2013) articulates care as a practice—an activity that is done—in her broad definition of care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Noddings (2010) distinguishes between care: "the fundamental concept in the ethic of care" (p. 72), and caregiving: "the set of activities associated with an occupation or form of work (paid or unpaid)" (p. 72). The distinction stands "because caregiving may proceed with or without caring, and caring—as it is developed in an ethic of care—is a moral way of life, one that guides personal interactions in every domain of activity" (p. 72). When I refer to caregiving or carework, I refer to the activities that are done so we can live in our "world" as well as possible. Throughout this project, I use care (the ethical concept) to reflect "the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (Held, 2006, p. 10). Importantly, care is not understood as a disposition, a feeling, or a principle that can be upheld in the abstract. Care is a concept that guides a moral way of life, and to be effective, it requires demonstration of competent caregiving in the particular context of a caring relationship.

A caring relationship is characterized by people doing the activities of caregiving in order to meet the needs of both people, the caregiver and the care receiver, in the relationship. Caring relationships are complex relationships, which sit in the middle of the self/other dichotomy. According to Slote (2007),"those who are engaged (together) in building or maintaining a caring relationship are typically motivated by a mixture or combination of egoistic (self-concerned) and altruistic (caring) motives" (p. 118). Held (2006) echoes this: "[p]ersons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together" (p. 13). Key to this distinction is the inclusion of a third party in this dynamic: the relationship itself.

> Those who conscientiously care for others are not seeking primarily to further their own individual interests; their interests are intertwined with the persons they care for. Neither are they acting for the sake of all others or humanity in general; they seek instead to preserve or promote an actual human relation between themselves and particular others. (Held, 2006, p. 13)

The preservation of the caring relationship demands both the caregiver and the care receiver compromise, checking their most egotistical interests. This challenges the notion that caring relationships require self-abnegation by any party. Later, I expand on the unique qualities of a caring teacher-student relationship.

I use *the ethics of care* and *care theory* to refer to the body of literature that forms the theoretical foundation of this project. The ethics of care challenges the idea of care as a disposition that comes naturally to some, it challenges the idea of care as something intangible, and it challenges the idea that care is only self-sacrificing. In an attempt to be consistent in the way I employ language, I refer to *care* as an ethical concept, and *caregiving* or *carework* as the activities done so we can live in our "world" as well as possible. A caring relationship is characterized by caregiving and the maintenance of the relationship itself.

Methodology

The operational definition of discourse for this project refers to the semiotic construal of aspects of the world (Fairclough, 2013). The role of the real, or material, world in relation to the semiotic world is not necessarily straightforward. My analysis will focus "on relations between discursive and material elements of social life rather than just discourse" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 177). Language is powerful, and the practice of policy produces "normative discourse for the reproduction of inequality, hegemony, and subordinated political subjects" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 774).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), "a form of critical social science, which is envisaged as social science geared to illuminating the problems which people are confronted with by particular forms of social life" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 125), is not a method unto itself. Fairclough's style of CDA draws from many scholars before him, notably the work of Michel Foucault. While I have not directly read Foucault, I acknowledge that the kind of analysis I am doing owes much to his work. What distinguishes Foucauldian analysis from CDA is "attention to concrete textual features … according to Fairclough (1992a)" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) see CDA as an attitude: "the critical turn in studies of language is by no means restricted to any single approach but represents a more general process of (partial) convergence in theories and practices of research on language" (p. 447). I situate this project at the intersection of several different traditions of discourse analysis.

Data

Deciding which documents to include in the analysis was an evolving set of choices: "[T]he boundaries of the discourse, or the object of study, for those engaged in discourse analysis is not clearly and externally delineated" (Herrera & Braumoeller, 2004, p. 18). As such, I used the theoretical framework of care ethics, and concepts from a review of the literature around the sociology of education and critical policy analysis, to decide which texts from the *Inspiring Education* ensemble would be most relevant. Ultimately, the data included in the analysis are

the "Inspiring Education Report" (excluding endnotes and appendices) and the first part of the "Task Force Report:" "Part I: Report to the Minister of Education, Government of Alberta." Both of these documents used to be publicly hosted online on the *Inspiring Education* website (https://inspiring.education.alberta.ca). That site has since been taken down, so the documents must be accessed from other sites.

Procedure

To begin analysis, I looked to "existing empirical research and theoretical work" (Hardy, Harley, & Phillips, 2004, p. 21) for direction in identifying relevant patterns of construing "aspects of the world" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 179). These themes delimited which patterns I coded for in the data. The first stage of analysis was content analysis. I used the search function in Atlas.ti to count the occurrences of particular words. Word counts do not feature as a large part of the analysis, but they were informative in my process, particularly as they related to ideologically significant vocabulary.

Additionally, I used "analytical categories or concepts" as introduced by Fairclough (1989) to keep my analysis closely engaged with features of the text. These concepts include the experiential values of words (i.e., co-occurrence or collocation of words, ideological significance of vocabulary); relational values of words (i.e., euphemistic expressions); and experiential values of grammatical features (i.e., active or passive sentence construction).

I also used concepts from Membership Categorization Analysis (henceforth MCA) to support my analysis of the discursive treatment of teachers. MCA is concerned with "how people 'do' descriptions and how they recognize descriptions: matters of cultural knowledge and relevance (Sacks, 1974, p. 216)" (Baker, 2000, p. 100). In the case of this analysis, the membership categories are categories of person; specifically, categories of teacher-types. These categories are bound to particular activities or qualities, which I refer to as predicates, but they can alternately be called "category-bound activities" or "category-tied activities" (Baker, 2000, p. 103). I also use the MCA concept of "standard relational pair" (i.e., "The hearing of the second term implied or suggested by the first" [Baker, 2000, p. 102]) to analyze the decoupling, or discursive separation, of the standard relational pair "teacher-student."

Analysis and Discussion

As I analyzed the *Inspiring Education* policies, I parsed out two patterns that, supported by concepts in the literature, seemed particularly relevant to the marginalization of care in teachers' work. First, several occurrences in the data represent a long established pattern of treating "women's work" as peripheral to the real work of economic competition. Sentimental interpretations of care abound in the world of elementary education, and without an alternative theory of the nature of a caring teacher-student relationship, sentimental care has negative consequences—not only for women, but for all teachers. Before proceeding with the analysis, I present an alternative theory: the caring teacher-student relationship built upon a mutual understanding of teacher competence. Next, I identify features of the data that construct the teacher as a facilitator of learning, a service provider who responds to the needs of the learner. This construction levels out hierarchy between teacher and student and, I argue, disadvantages both parties. Combined, these two patterns are harmful to teachers because they simultaneously establish an unrealistic expectation of care and erase the teacher as a competent adult who takes

responsibility for the student coming into the world.

Allusions to Care—Sentimental Treatment

The language in the policies of *Inspiring Education* construes care as peripheral to the real work of school. One way this is done is through the fleeting and unsubstantiated use of the language of care and love—an artifact of what Ann Douglas (1988) calls "sentimentalism". It elevates maternal love to cult status: "the cult of motherhood" (Grumet, 1988, p. 41) to which every female elementary school teacher is subject. The influence of sentimentalism is evident in the contradiction between the rhetorically inflated figure of the loving, compassionate, self-abnegating teacher and the practically deflated function of that teacher (Grumet, 1988). Following are some examples of discursive moves within the texts of *Inspiring Education* that contribute to a pattern of sentimentalism.

Part I of the "Teaching Excellence Report" features one occurrence of the word care, and none of the word caring. The following describes caring as one of the key attributes of excellent teachers:

> Compassionate, empathetic, caring, kind, understanding, and relationship builders. For example, a student participating in Task Force consultations said: "Truly having a good teacher is to be able to connect with him or her and their teaching method. More than just the way he or she teaches, but on a personal level as well. To be able to connect with someone will truly make it easier to understand what they are saying and to comprehend material in depth." (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 19)

The above excerpt occurs near the beginning of the "Teaching Excellence Report," but no mention of the words care, kind, or kindness appear again. The speaker quoted describes the teacher-student relationship as complex, even personal, but the intimate quality of the relationship is not referenced again. The only teacher attribute to which the authors refer again is relationship builder.

The Alberta Association of Deans of Education (AADE) identifies "fosters supportive learning relationships" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 29) as a key competency of effective teachers. Though the recommendations of the AADE are listed as a sidebar in the report, the Task Force authors elevate their relevance by suggesting they be a launching point for revisions of the provincial teaching practice standards. From the perspective of care theory, relationship builder is a generic category. Relationships are not all equal, and the authors of the "Teaching Excellence Report" do not specify the nature of effective teacher-student relationships. The norms that govern them, the boundaries that delimit responsibilities—these qualities remain ambiguous. The singular mention of "compassionate, empathetic, caring, kind, understanding" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 19) amidst an abundance of language of competition, achievement, and self-reliance is more empty rhetoric than genuine interest in supporting caring teacher-student relationships.

The "Inspiring Education Report" also includes some language of care. Notably, the description of the Ethical Citizen:

> Ethical Citizen: "I do the right thing because it is the right thing to do."
>
> It's not all about me. I have learned about and appreciate the effort and sacrifice that built this

> province and country. My education has helped me see beyond my self-interests to the needs of the community. As a result, I contribute fully to the world around me—economically, culturally, socially and politically. As a steward of the earth, I minimize environmental impacts wherever I go.
>
> I build relationships through humility; fairness and open-mindedness; and with teamwork and communication. I engage with many cultures, religions, and languages. This enables me to value diversity in all people and adapt to any situation. I demonstrate respect, empathy and compassion for all people.
>
> I can care for myself physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually, yet I am able to ask for help when needed from others and for others. I am well-prepared to assume the responsibilities of life—whether they be the duties of a parent, a neighbour, a mentor, or an employee or employer. (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 19)

The Ethical Citizen is self-reliant, an individual who contributes, asks for help when he needs it, and is well-prepared for the "duties" of being a parent, neighbour, mentor, employee, or employer (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 19). This characterization is still absent of the reciprocity of caring relationships, the complexity of the network of caring relationships in which we are all a part.

A better approximation of a caring teacher-student relationship occurs in a sidebar:

> To my son ... when I think of education in 20 years, I hope that your teachers have loved you and nurtured you and helped you to become a "ready citizen" for your adult journey of life. I hope your teachers have instilled the power of life-long learning and teamwork. Community Conversation, Fort McMurray. (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 31)

This contribution from a community member is the only example in the "Inspiring Education Report" that suggests a teacher-student relationship which might have other-than-market value, value that does not readily translate into economic terms but is nonetheless an important feature of social life. Love and nurturance speak to an ethic of care, as they suggest a moral quality of teaching beyond preparing future economic contributors. The above excerpt is even more significant when taken in the context of the document as a whole. First, it is the only reference to teacher-student relationships that extends beyond the narrow concept of teacher as "architect of learning." Second, the excerpt is presented as a sidebar, literally in the margins of the "Inspiring Education Report."

The authors of *Inspiring Education* perpetuate the marginalization of caring work by briefly mentioning caring, loving, nurturing, teachers, and then getting on with the more important stuff of educational policy. The occurrences of the words compassionate and nurturing play on a kind of mistaken nostalgia about teacher-student relationships.

Women who first entered the teaching profession through the common schools of the late-19th century did so under the veil of moral superiority bestowed upon them for their feminine self-sacrifice, submissiveness, purity, and domesticity. Theoretically, this moral superiority could then be dispensed in schools and leveraged in the process of educating children (Grumet, 1988, p. 40). The impossibility of this sentimental notion soon revealed itself:

> The moralistic and impossible demand that women, without expressing anger or aggression, control children who were resisting a tightly repressive and tedious regime encouraged teachers to confuse

> the logical consequences of these harsh conditions for the failure of their own discipline, intelligence, and inspiration. (Grumet, 1988, p. 52)

In the 21st century the rhetoric may be packaged differently, but the contradictions hold strong. The language in *Inspiring Education* does not represent practical consideration of care. Instead, the authors chose to include unsubstantiated references to caring relationships, and then get on with constructing teaching as a process of facilitation, in which the teacher neither maintains responsibility for educating students, nor holds authority in the relationship, nor claims mastery over the knowledge students are to gain.

Inequality and Authority as a Counterpoint to Sentimentality

Here I will deviate from the discourse analysis to consider what alternatives exist to the *Inspiring Education* construction of the teacher-student relationship. The sentimental figure of the caring teacher is inadequate, and it does a disservice to caring professionals who are held up to a standard ungrounded in the reality of the teaching experience. One way forward is to integrate the idea of a caring teacher with the idea of a competent, authoritative teacher. Caring would no longer be misconstrued as a natural disposition of young female teachers, but a professional responsibility to be fulfilled by competent adults.

Tronto (2013) considers the meaning of competency in her four-step process of caring. The first step is caring about. Simply put, this is the step in which the caregiver "notices unmet caring needs" (p. 22). The second step is caring for, in which the caregiver "has to take responsibility to make certain that these needs are met" (p. 22). This critical step must come before any caring is done. The third step is caregiving, which "requires that the actual care-giving work be done" (p. 22). Through the doing of the activity, the actual work, an adult demonstrates their assumption of responsibility. This work is visible, it is part of the material world, and it is unevenly distributed across gender, race, and class lines. Tronto (2013) aligns the third step, the doing of carework, with the moral quality of competence:

> Assuming responsibility is not yet the same as doing the actual work of care; doing such work is the third phase of caring and requires the moral quality of competence. To be competent to care, given one's caring responsibilities, is not simply a technical issue, but a moral one. (p. 35, emphasis in original)

The ethical principle of care is unmet if caregiving is attempted, but incompetently executed. Competence is confirmed in the fourth step, care receiving, in which the caregiver is receptive to feedback from the person who has been cared for. Competent caring would result in, over both the short and long term, improvement of the condition of the care receiver. Competency establishes an inequality between those who are competent to achieve a standard of care in a particular context, and those who are not. Inequality is not necessarily a feature of all caring relationships: in some caring relationships, as between two competent adults, "we expect mutuality; the parties exchange places as the situation within which the relation exists changes" (Noddings, 2010, p. 46). In other relationships, as between a young child and a competent adult, the responsibility to meet the needs of the other party rests with the adult (not to say that children should not care; they should and they often do). In a teacher-student relationship, the teacher rightly relates to the student differently than the student relates to the teacher.

Teacher-student relationships are unequal in the way most adult-child relationships are unequal. Hannah Arendt (2006) attributes the distinction between adult and child to natality: "the fact that human beings are born into the world" (Arendt, 2006, p. 171). Adults have gained knowledge from being in the world; they acquire a kind of competency along the way to adulthood that distinguishes them from the "new" people. In Arendt's estimation, the political temperament of America is allergic to ideas of inequality, and I am sympathetic to this allergy. I understand the influence of "learner centred" educational policies, and I have devoted many professional hours to discovery, inquiry, and project-based pedagogies. I understand that asserting superiority of adults over children highlights children's vulnerability. But inequality in a relationship is not the same as coercion or persuasion. A caring, unequal, authoritative adult-child relationship is not tyrannical, but mutually accepted.

Arendt's concept of authority has, as I interpret it, two main premises. First, the "compelling element" (Arendt, 2006, p. 109) of authoritative relationships is the hierarchical nature of the relationship itself. Authority is commonly conflated with "coercion by force" and "persuasion through argumentation" (Arendt, 2006 p. 92), as these concepts share elements of both obedience and hierarchy. However, in a coercive relationship, the compelling element that ensures obedience is physical dominance. In contrast, the "compelling element" in an authoritative relationship is the "rightness and legitimacy" (Arendt, 2006, p. 93) of the hierarchical relationship—a hierarchy which is recognized and honoured by both parties. In a persuasive relationship, all parties begin as equal, and the compelling element for obedience is the strength of argument. A persuasive relationship could be a suitable model for political relationships, but it is not suitable for adult-child relationships because adults and children are not equal parties. The kind of authority Arendt considers is the kind of authority which could exist in the family, between parent and child, or in the school, between teacher "in loco parentis" and student. Authority relies on the dominance of one party over the other—an inequality "which, from the point of view of human dignity, must never exist" (Arendt, 2006, p. 187) among adults.

> The second premise of authority relative to adult and child—or teacher and student—is that, authority rests on his [sic] assumption of responsibility for that world. Vis-à-vis the child it is as though he [sic] were a representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world. (Arendt, 2006, p. 186)

Adults demonstrate their assumption of responsibility by actively mediating children's exposure to the world. Adults provide the child with "special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him [sic] from the world" (Arendt, 2006, p. 182). Protection and care manifest in the holistic practice of education: the gradual introduction of children to the wider world. By virtue of inequality, adults must take responsibility for mediating children's exposure to the broader world in order for dependent children to survive. "This responsibility is not arbitrarily imposed upon educators [or adults in general]; it is implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world" (Arendt, 2006, p. 186). In a caring adult-child relationship, both parties accept the legitimacy of the hierarchy and both parties find value in maintaining the relationship. It has never served teachers, or caregivers of any stripe, to treat them as either incompetent or sentimental. The careful merging of the necessity of caring teacher-student relationships with the equally necessary idea of a competent, authoritative teacher might begin to reflect the complexity of the work of teaching.

The Facilitator Discourse—Flattening the Relationship

Through several different discursive moves, the authors of *Inspiring Education* construct the teacher as a facilitator of the process of learning instead of a guiding figure in the process of educating. Turning to *Inspiring Education*, I consider the authors' juxtaposition of the "architect of learning" teacher-type with the "knowledge authority" teacher-type, and I analyze the discursive separation of the category teacher from the category expert. Finally, I examine the decoupling of the category student from the category teacher. Collectively, these discursive characteristics perpetuate the assumption that teacher-student relationships ought to be absent of hierarchy and authority. It is part of a trend, identified by theorists of care as well as education, which I call the flattening of the adult-child relationship. While this trend may seem to alleviate the adult burden of responsibility for children's education, I argue that it is problematic for caregivers and care receivers alike.

Biesta (2006) describes "the new language of learning" (p. 15)—the rise of "learning" and the decline of "education"—as one of the most remarkable changes to recently occur in the field of education: "Teaching has become redefined as supporting or facilitating learning, just as education is now often described as providing learning opportunities or learning experiences. Pupils and students have become learners" (Biesta, 2006, p. 15). "Learner centred" pedagogy keeps with an ideological shift, also identified by care theorists, towards equality in the adult-child relationship. Authors of the "Teaching Excellence Report" embrace the language of learning, explicitly shifting away from a system which values "imparting knowledge," "authority and management," and a "focus on content" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 11). These "old" values underpinned a system in which the "knowledge authority" category of teacher would feel at home; a system that is "structured and restrictive" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 11).

This anecdote in the "Inspiring Education Report" places students at the centre of the process of learning—the teacher does not garner a mention:

> For example, to study history, students might be given an opportunity to travel. They would read, examine archives, analyze documents, interview experts, and engage in the re-creation of historical events … They would augment their study of facts with experience of a people, a place, and a culture. Or, with coming advancements in technology, they may be able to approximate this study and experience it without leaving their classroom. In so doing, they might be exposed to what is involved in becoming an individual with expert abilities, skills and knowledge. (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 26)

The learner, the only active agent in the learning process, constructs her understanding and knowledge based on her individual interactions and experiences in the world. The metaphor of construction is powerful in the way it is broadly applied: "Notions such as 'scaffolding' have provided a perspective in which teaching can easily be redefined as supporting and facilitating learning" (Biesta, 2006, p. 17). Excellent teachers scaffold the learners' construction of abilities, skills, and knowledge. To extend the metaphor, they act as "an architect of learning" (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 7).

The juxtaposition of the "architect of learning" teacher-type with the "knowledge authority" teacher-type constructs the teacher-as-facilitator. Repeatedly, the authors of both the "Inspiring Education Report" and the "Teaching Excellence Report" contrast the "architect of learning" teacher-type with the "knowledge authority" category of teacher:

> Albertans see the role of the teacher changing from that of a knowledge authority to an architect of learning—one who plans, designs and oversees learning activities. (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 7)

> Expertise as a creator of knowledge. Quite opposed to acting as content experts, teachers must act as architects of learning to achieve the 3E's. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 19)

> One of the central elements of Inspiring Education relates to the role of the teacher, shifting from that of "sage" to that of "architect of learning" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 32)

The category of "knowledge authority" is associated with "the dissemination of information and recall of facts" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 13) and is framed as an artifact of times past, from which we must move away.

In both the "Inspiring Education Report" and the "Teaching Excellence Report," the membership category "excellent teacher" is associated with particular predicates (i.e., activities, rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, attributes, or competencies [S. Talmy, personal communication, 2014]). The "excellent teacher" of *Inspiring Education's* vision focuses on "five key competencies of an effective teacher" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 29) as initially identified by the Alberta Association of Deans of Education:

> An effective teacher:
> 1. designs academically and intellectually engaging learning;
> 2. engages students in meaningful learning experiences;
> 3. assesses student learning to guide teaching and improve learning;
> 4. fosters supportive learning relationships;
> 5. collaborates to enhance teaching and learning. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 29)

The "excellent teacher" competently designs, engages, assesses, fosters, and collaborates. He considers the interests, passions, talents, and natural curiosities of the learner. She "would inspire, motivate and plant the seeds for life-long learning" (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 7). The "excellent teacher" supports students, innovates, models, guides, and facilitates. The "excellent teacher" identifies, develops, supports, "brings ideas to life" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 19), and takes "risks in learning" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 19). These "excellent teachers" integrate ideas, reflect upon actions, and "build community support structures and create innovative learning environments" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 20). Not only do "excellent teachers" demonstrate competencies themselves, but they also help students do the same:

> Inspiring Education envisions teachers helping students to develop core competencies, including the ability to think critically, to manage information, and to explore new opportunities. Students will be supported as individuals, with full consideration of their unique interests, experiences, and abilities. Teachers will work in partnership with the community and will work more closely with one another. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 32)

The predicates associated with the membership category "excellent teacher" are summarized as "an architect of learning—one who plans, designs and oversees learning activities" (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 7). An "architect of learning" does not impose knowledge upon the learner. The teacher as "architect of learning" constructs the context, and the learner—in the spirit of

individualization—constructs his or her own meaning. The teacher does not challenge or disrupt the student, reducing the significance of the educational relationship.

In addition to the construction of the ideal "architect of learning" teacher-type, the authors of *Inspiring Education* construct teachers as a separate membership category from experts. While *Inspiring Education* does emphasize that teachers should have expertise as "architects of learning" and "creation of knowledge" (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 19), the category teacher is constructed as separate from the category expert. In the following selection of examples, the category teacher is collocated with "expertise."

> … Expertise as a creator of knowledge. Quite opposed to acting as content experts, teachers must act as architects of learning to achieve the 3E's. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 19)
> The Task Force believes that truly excellent teachers are not sufficiently recognized and provided opportunities to share their expertise. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 24)

> An important step in achieving the vision of Inspiring Education occurs at the decision point of whom [sic] enters the profession of teaching. Ideally, we want a community of teachers with a mix of experience, subject expertise and passion. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 31)

In the following examples, however, the category teacher is separate from the category expert.

> For example, the teacher might invite an expert in from the community to teach a class, perhaps in financial management or stage design. The expert might teach the class independently or with the teacher. (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 23)

> The Task Force further recommends changes that will provide greater flexibility for schools to use community-based experts. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 23)

> It describes a system where a teacher might invite an expert in to instruct a class. The expert might even instruct a class without direct teacher supervision but under the guidance of the principal. (Task Force for Teaching Excellence, 2014, p. 34)

Although teachers are referred to as having expertise, they are not considered experts. The authors of the "Inspiring Education Report," in fact, assert the necessity of involving someone other than the teacher so students "might be exposed to what is involved in becoming an individual with expert abilities, skills and knowledge" (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 26). From my own experience teaching unfamiliar subjects (i.e., high school film studies), I find this idea particularly hard to accept. That a teacher can have a kind of loose expertise in pedagogy, but not expert status in the subject, and still successfully facilitate the learning of a group of students is, in my experience, a fiction. A teacher-student relationship without the teacher holding relative mastery over the content is a teacher-student relationship with no compelling element. Why would students trust a teacher who, when asked for guidance, is forced to shrug and call in the real expert?

In addition to emphasizing teachers as "architects" of learning, and discursively treating teachers as non-experts, the category teacher is also decoupled from the category student. The authors of the "Inspiring Education Report" decouple the categories student and learner from the category teacher. "Teacher" occurs 36 times in the body of the "Inspiring Education Report," and "educator" appears 8 times. In total, the authors include 44 references to these categories.

Comparatively, the variations on the word "student" occur 43 times and on the word "learner" occur 84 times. In total, there are 127 references to these categories—three times as many as there are to teachers. In itself, this imbalance is not surprising, as "learner centred" is a central value of *Inspiring Education*. As part of a larger representation of teachers, though, this imbalance begins to seem more meaningful.

Additionally, of the 127 occurrences of "student" and "learner," only 11.8% co-occur in the same sentence with "teacher" or "educator." Student/learner and teacher/educator are rarely associated with one another. The teacher and the students are not treated as a relational pair—each category is constructed as independent of the other. Separation of the teacher from the education of the student is nowhere more apparent in the *Inspiring Education* ensemble than in the following excerpt, in which teachers are mentioned only to point out that they do not quit their jobs as frequently as they used to:

> Why a Vision Matters
>
> Caslan School draws almost all of its 100 students from Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, located some nine kilometres away. In 2003, the school faced several issues: student behaviour and attendance, staff retention and provincial exam scores.
>
> Just three years later, there was a different scene: approximately 450 people pressed into Buffalo Lake's community hall to watch the initial version of Trust Our Voices, a video filmed by the students of Caslan … Community members watched with tears of pride as their children showcased their cultural traditions.
>
> What had happened in the three years in between? Caslan School partnered with the national ArtsSmarts organization, and created a project sponsored by the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). It integrated Métis heritage, culture, and the fine arts into the curriculum. That integration of culture and arts continues today as part of the school's identity. The students are learning their culture—they have performed jigging, fiddling and guitar routines across Western Canada before international audiences and government dignitaries. One of the school's graduates, has released two CDs. The students are creative, entrepreneurial, and participating in their community as engaged citizens.
>
> Today, when Buffalo Lake students arrive at school they are personally welcomed at the front door by school staff, often with hugs and high fives. Behavioural problems are reduced, suspensions are a fraction of what they once were, and attendance is improved. Teachers and support staff are staying longer. There truly is a sense of a lasting connection between the school and Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement.
>
> … Clearly, a vision has been formed at Caslan School and Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement. (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 17)

In the preceding excerpt, the positive change that affects the community and students is attributed to the vision ("Clearly, a vision has been formed at Caslan School and Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement" [p. 17]) and a partnership ("Caslan School partnered with the national ArtsSmarts organization, and created a project sponsored by the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)" [p. 17]). The inanimate pronoun "it," referring to the partnership, is credited with integrating "Métis heritage, culture, and the fine arts into the curriculum" (p. 17).

This move downplays the agency of teachers in positively influencing student and community life.

A Problem for Care

The discourses identified in the analysis flatten the teacher-student hierarchy, rewriting the nature of an adult's responsibility to a child. The language of learning "has facilitated a redescription of the process of education in terms of an economic transaction" (Biesta, 2006, p. 19), in which the learner is the (potential) consumer with certain needs, the teacher is the provider, and education itself becomes the commodity (Biesta, 2006). This perspective supports

> the idea that educational institutions and individual educators should be flexible, that they should respond to the needs of the learners, that they should give their learners value for money, and perhaps even that they should operate on the principle that the learner/customer is always right. (Biesta, 2006, p. 20)

In contrast, caring relationships—particularly unequal ones, in which one party is dependent on the other—are "typically motivated by a mixture or combination of egoistic (self-concerned) and altruistic (caring) motives" (Slote, 2007, p. 118). This altruism, rooted in a sense of responsibility for those newer to the world than us, is eliminated in a consumer-provider relationship. Instead of acting to achieve an ethical standard of care, the individualistic logic of the market applies: You get yours, and I get mine.

The complexity of a caring relationship is reflected in Biesta's concept of the educational relationship, characterized by one party who is "coming into the world" (Biesta, 2006, p. 27).

> Coming into the world is not something individuals can do on their own. This is first of all for the obvious reason that in order to come into the world one needs a world, and this world is a world inhabited by others who are not like us. Coming into the world also isn't something that we should understand as an act or decision of a pre-social individual. (Biesta, 2006, p. 27)

"Coming into the world" resembles Arendt's (2006) concept of natality: "the fact that human beings are born into the world" (p. 171). What we ask of children, in the process of education, is to be part of the world that already exists here; "Coming into the world is definitely *not* about self-expression" (Biesta, 2006, p. 28, emphasis in original). Of course, taken to one extreme, eliminating self-expression entirely is not generative to the process of education, either. The other extreme, however, of reducing education to an economic transaction, is also stifling to both teachers and students. It leaves children without the protective buffer of the guidance of a caring, responsible adult, and it limits the possibilities of adults sharing their world with children.

A Caring Teacher-Student Relationship

A caring teacher-student relationship has a number of characteristics. First, the ethical principle of care ("the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" [Held, 2006, p. 10]) can only be met if the teacher is willing and able to demonstrate competent caring: over the short or long term, the carework of the adult teacher must result in an improvement of the condition of the care receiver. A caring

teacher-student relationship requires competence. Second, a caring teacher-student relationship is characterized by inequality: a child is not competent to maintain a standard of care in the way an adult teacher is competent. The morally sound nature of this inequality is authoritative. Authority is mutually accepted, not coercive or persuasive. To be sure, it can feel uncomfortable to couple care with authority. But inequality does not disappear just because it is no longer in vogue or written in policies. Children are vulnerable. Adults are older, more powerful, more knowledgeable. Is it not a better way forward to name that inequality openly, and acknowledge its value to our understanding of a caring teacher?

A caring teacher is one who takes seriously her ethical obligation to meet the needs of her students, be they physical, emotional, social, or academic. A caring teacher is one who demonstrates competence, who is prepared to show students the best way he knows how. A caring teacher-student relationship is characterized by the mutual acceptance of inequality, because that inequality benefits the student: they have a caring adult to guide them on their way. This language—of responsibility, of competence, of knowledge, or ethical obligation and guidance—should take up more space in the policies of *Inspiring Education*. It would provide a political foothold for teachers, something to use as leverage in debates about professional development, student achievement, workload, attrition, and stress. It would provide a justification for all the work we do that is so difficult to measure but which we know must certainly matter. And, by including this language in our educational policies, it might help the women who give so much to the profession and still feel like they have failed, because the norms by which we are judged in society are so different from the norms which are present in the policies which shape the context of teaching.

Conclusion

Teaching is undoubtedly a profession of many intangibles, and at the top of this list is the expectation to care. A teacher who is said to really care about her students is held in high regard, while accusing a teacher of not caring is a strong condemnation of her character. Despite this emphasis on care, the concept is largely undefined in educational policies in Alberta. The purpose of this project is to consider how the discursive treatment of teachers within *Inspiring Education* texts influences the possibility of a caring teacher-student relationship. I identified two discourses that represent a particular perspective on teachers' work. First, the pattern in *Inspiring Education* texts of using fleeting and unsubstantiated language of care—an artifact of sentimentalism. The evidence of sentimentalism is in the occurrences of language of love, nurturance, and ethical citizenship, and the absence of consideration of the hard physical, intellectual, and emotional work it takes to maintain caring relationships. That hard work is the stuff of a competent teacher, a teacher who has been in the world longer than students, and who takes responsibility for showing them the way forward. A caring teacher-student relationship is more complex than a doting teacher responding to the desires of a "learner." If we are to give teachers their due, we will begin to reflect in educational policies the reciprocity of caring educational relationships, the rightness of mutually accepted authority, and the skills it requires to competently perform the work of caring.

Second, I identify the discourse of the teacher-as-facilitator. The authors of *Inspiring Education* construct the teacher as a facilitator of the process of learning. This is achieved through several discursive moves: the incorporation of the "the new language of learning" (Biesta, 2006, p. 15), the valuing of the "architect of learning" teacher-type over the "knowledge

authority" teacher-type, the discursive separation of the category teacher from the category expert, and the decoupling of the category student from the category teacher.

Despite the scope and influence of the discourses highlighted in this analysis, none of the obstacles in the way of care eliminate its enduring importance. The world turns on our ability to care for each other. The effect of the discourses within *Inspiring Education* is the continued obfuscation of care. Doing carework is simultaneously exalted and seen as peripheral to the economic transaction of "learning" (Biesta, 2006). There is a misalignment between the expectation on teachers to care and the practical consideration of that work. By ignoring, or sentimentalizing, the role of care in our education system, we perpetuate the de facto methods of distributing the responsibility of care. Those who have historically, quietly, conscientiously shouldered the caring load will continue to feel "that it is everything that could possibly matter to us" (Grumet, 1988, p. xi), but about which we are prohibited to speak.

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